DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 493 PS 021 964

AUTHOR Allen, Michael G.; Sheppard, Ronnie
TITLE Profile of Georgia Schools in the Middle: A Research Report.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 28p.
AVAILABLE FROM Michael G. Allen, College of Education, Georgia Southern University, Landrum Box 8134, Statesboro, GA 30460-8134 ($5).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Problems; Curriculum Design; Educational Assessment; Educational Counseling; Educational Objectives; Independent Study; *Institutional Characteristics; Instruction; Instructional Improvement; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; Report Cards; School Administration; Staff Development; State Surveys
IDENTIFIERS *Georgia

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to provide a current data profile on Georgia's middle grade schools that could serve as a baseline for periodic reassessments of the state's middle grade schools. A 19-item questionnaire was mailed to Georgia's 284 public middle grade schools in October 1990, requesting information on administration organization; grade configuration; housing arrangements; articulation; the establishment of the middle-level school; decision-making; staff development; core and elective curricula; instructional organization, groupings, and schedules; independent study; pupil progress reports; student counseling; school evaluation; faculty preparation; plans for evaluation; and major problems. Study findings, based on responses from 129 (45%) of the schools included the following: (1) 88 of the responding schools offered grades 6 through 8, and 19 offer grades 7 and 8; (2) the most prominent housing arrangement is the single physical plant that contains a combination of grades 5 or 6 through 8 or 9; (3) with approximately 1,414 public school buildings housing middle graders, most of Georgia's early adolescents are housed in either K-6, K-8, or 7-12 schools; and (4) the principal reason for establishing middle schools was to better bridge the elementary and high school educational experience. Based on study findings, 10 recommendations were put forth for improving middle school education in Georgia. A 14-item bibliography and a list of 10 essential elements of a "true" middle school are provided. (AC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 369 493

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PROFILE OF GEORGIA SCHOOLS IN THE MIDDLE

A Research Report

Michael G. Allen

Ronnie Sheppard

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Ronnie Sheppard
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Georgia Middle School Association
and
Georgia Association of Middle School Prinicpals

PS 021964

DEDICATION

To my Fall 1990 students in MG 452 who "kept me honest" in our study of middle school curriculum while maintaining an abiding interest in the progress of this study. You did both with a wonderful sense of humor and gentleness.

Gwen, Karen, Michelle, Claire, Mary, Amy E., Joyce, Michael, Amy K., Renee, Stephanie, Denise, Tony, Sally, Sandra, Charlene, Marie, Stacy S., Stacy T., Dana, Terri, Mike, Patty!

MGA

A special note of THANKS to Kim Wood and Michelle Binford for their work in compiling the raw data from the questionnaires.

MGA
RLS

Copyright 1991 by Michael G. Allen and Ronnie L. Sheppard. All rights reserved. The views expressed in this report reflect those of the authors and are not necessarily official positions of GMSA or GAMSA.

Imaging Systems Specialists
Beth Parrish
Donna Colson
Tina Southwell

Printed in the United States
By Lewis Printing, Statesboro, Georgia 30458

$5.00

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS	PAGE
Dedication/Copyright	i
Table of Contents	ii
List of Tables	iii
Foreword	iv
Introduction	v
The Survey Questionnaire	
Identifying Georgia's Middle Level Schools	
Data Collection and Analysis	
Section One: Findings	1
Administrative Organization	1
Grade Configuration	
Housing Arrangements	
Articulation	
Establishing the Middle Level School	2
Deciding Grade Configuration	3
Staff Development	4
Curriculum	4
Common Subjects (Core)	
Required/Elective Exploratory Programing	
Other Curriculum Opportunities	
Instruction	9
Instructional Organization	
Grouping for Instruction	
Instructional Schedule	
Independent Study	
Reporting Pupil Progress	
Counseling Students	
School Evaluation	13
Other Data	13
Home Base/Teacher Advisory	
Faculty Pre and Professional Preparation	
Plans for Evaluation	
Major Problems	
Section Two: Overview of Results	15
Conclusions	
Recommendations	
Bibliography	19
Appendix A: Essential Elements of a "True" Middle School	20
About the Authors	21

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Middle Level Schools by Grade Configuration
Table 1A	Schools with Middle Grades Based on Georgia Public Education 1990 Directory
Table 2	Articulation Strategies
Table 3	Reasons for Establishing Middle Level Schools
Table 4	Persons Deciding Grade Organization
Table 5	Staff Development Prior to Opening
Table 6	Required/Elective Exploratory Programming
Table 6A	Other Required/Elective Exploratory Programming
Table 7	Other Elective Activities
Table 7A	Other Elective Activities
Table 8	Instructional Organization
Table 9	Grouping for Instruction
Table 10	Scheduling for Instruction
Table 11	Independent Study
Table 12	Reporting Pupil Progress
Table 13	Personnel Counseling Students
Table 14	School Evaluation
Table 15	Problems Establishing Middle Grade Schools

FOREWORD

The dramatic growth in middle grades schools nationwide and in Georgia has fostered a corresponding need for data with which to plan more carefully organizational and curricular changes. Major legislative and Department of Education commitments to improving middle level education in Georgia and corresponding proliferation of middle grades schools and programs necessitates a clearer understanding of the existing situation throughout the state.

We know that certain elements are considered essential to sound middle grades programs. Yet without a current data profile, we are unable to ascertain the degree of compliance with such characteristics. To what extent do Georgia's middle level schools exhibit such "essential" characteristics? What variations in organization, programming, staff development, instruction, and exploratory programming exist in these schools? Finally, over time, what changes can we identify as occurring in these same schools as their administrators and faculties strive to provide the best possible educational experience for early adolescents?

This study, and its conclusions and recommendations, offers readers an up-to-date data profile on the range of middle grades situations extant in Georgia at this time.

MGA

RLS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was twofold. First the authors sought to provide a current data profile on Georgia's middle grades schools. Second, this data profile was designed to serve as a data baseline for reassessment of the state's middle grades schools through periodic replication of the initial study.

The study is divided into two sections. Section One reports current data on Georgia's middle grades schools as reported by principals in a questionnaire. Section Two draws several conclusions from the data and offers readers a series of specific recommendations concerning middle grades education in Georgia.

The Survey Instrument

A 19 item questionnaire was mailed to the 284 middle grades schools throughout Georgia in October, 1990. The survey instrument was a slightly revised version of the one employed by Alexander and McEwin in their recent survey of middle school education in the United States (Alexander & McEwin, 1989).

Identifying Georgia's Middle Level Schools

The Georgia Department of Education publication *Georgia Public Education 1990 Directory* was used to identify appropriate schools for the study. The schools identified for inclusion in the study contained any combination of grades four or five through eight or nine. Two hundred eighty-four schools fit this definition.

Data Collection and Analysis

The survey questionnaire was mailed to each of the 284 identified middle grades schools. One hundred twenty-nine completed questionnaires were received, which represents a 45% return. The data were transferred to tally sheets, collated and summarized for presentation in both narrative and table form.

It is hoped that any future replication of this study will realize a greater return from Georgia's middle grades schools.

SECTION ONE: FINDINGS

Administrative Organization

Data describing the administrative organization of Georgia's middle grades schools are reported in three categories—grade configuration, housing arrangements for students and means employed for providing articulation between sending and receiving schools.

Grade Configuration

The single predominant grade arrangement in Georgia's middle grades schools is 6-8, with eighty-eight reported (Table 1). The next closest reported is the 7-8 configuration with nineteen. In addition there were reported seven other grade configurations for middle grades. These data also are found in Table 1-A.

Housing Arrangements

By a wide margin the most prominent housing arrangement for Georgia's middle schools is the single physical plant that contains a combination of grades 5 or 6 through 8 or nine with a few containing only two grades—usually 7-8 or a single—usually grade 6. The "school-within-a-school" plan and certain grades in separate buildings on the same campus were reported in twenty-one and twenty schools respectively. Nine respondents reported that their middle grades were housed in a physical plant with lower and/or higher grades.

With approximately 1,414 public school buildings housing middle graders most of Georgia's early adolescents are housed in either K-6, K-8 or 7-12 schools. Economic and historical forces lie at the heart of such housing arrangements. And, while such forces remain at work, new laws regarding the formation of middle grades schools and for improving the education of the state's early adolescents should change the "face" of middle grades education in this decade throughout the state.

TABLE 1

Middle Level Schools by Grade Configuration+

GRADE	4 - 8	5 - 8	6 - 8	7 - 8
TOTAL	0	4	88	19

Fifteen schools reporting have other configurations: 5 - 7, 8 - 9, 6 - 6, 6 - 7, and 6.

+ This represents the total number of respondents. The number represents a 45% return.

TABLE 1A

Schools with Middle Grades Based on
Georgia Public Education 1990 Directory+

GRADE	4	5	6	7	8
TOTAL	987	993	688	523	411

+ Actual number of schools having these grades.

Articulation

A diverse set of strategies to provide articulation between middle grades schools and those with lower and higher grades are employed in Georgia (Table 2). The most frequently used articulation strategies include visitation of the middle grade schools by students from feeder schools, obtaining or providing data on students entering or leaving the middle grade school, giving program information to elementary and/or high schools, student visitation and orientation in the high school, and visitation of the middle grades school by high school representative for the purpose of orientation.

Other articulation strategies employed by the schools reporting include joint workshops with teachers in lower and higher grades, joint curriculum planning activities with teachers of higher and/or lower grades, and middle school teacher visitation of elementary and/or high schools. These and related data also are reported in Table 2. Information about student academic performance and school-related attitudes and behaviors seem to predominate the articulation process.

TABLE 2

Articulation Strategies*

STRATEGY *	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
TOTAL	69	68	50	31	98	99	92	113	53	88	26	10

*1. Joint workshops with teachers in lower/higher grades.
*2. Joint curriculum planning activities with teachers in lower/higher grades.
*3. Middle school teacher visitation of elementary or high school.
*4. Sharing faculty with elementary and/or high school.
*5. Giving program information to elementary and/or high school.
*6. Obtaining or providing data on students entering or leaving your school.
*7. Student visitation of high school for orientation.
*8. Visitation of your school from feeder schools.
*9. Middle school students' visit to feeder schools to acquaint elementary students with your program and facilities.
*10. Visitation of your school by high school representatives for the purpose of orientation.
*11. Middle school students take advanced course work in the high school.
*12. Other: Parent visitations and orientation; eighth-graders take vocational courses in the high school; middle school students take high school courses in the middle school; cluster meetings of feeder schools for a community purpose; use of high school library; workshops for rising fifth grade parents; joint PTA projects with feeder schools; shared extra-curricular activities; fifth graders shadowing students in sixth grade.

*multiple responses

Establishing The Middle Level School

As might be expected, most schools reporting indicate that the desire to bridge better the elementary and the high school educational experience was the principal reason for establishing their middle school. Providing a program specifically designed for children of this age group was another important reason in more than half of the schools. To remedy the weakness of the junior high school was another important consideration. These and related data are reported in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Reasons for Establishing Middle Level Schools*

REASONS*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
TOTAL	28	27	4	90	52	11	44	76	14	19	22	14	7

*1. To remedy the weakness of the two level organization.
*2. To move Grade 9 into the high school.
*3. To provide more specialization in Grade 5 and/or 6.
*4. To bridge better the elementary and the high school.
*5. To remedy the weaknesses of the junior high school.
*6. To aid desegregation.
*7. To eliminate crowded conditions in other schools.
*8. To provide a program specifically designed for children in this age group.
*9. To utilize a new building.
*10. To try out various innovations.
*11. To use plans that have been successful in other school systems.
*12. To utilize an older building when a new senior high school was built.
*13. Other: pilot program; to qualify for state middle school incentive grant; close school because of decreasing enrollment; trend in the state; prevent overcrowding; move 8th grade from high school; utilize existing buildings.

* multiple responses

Deciding Grade Organization

In the schools reporting, two groups predominate in determining the grade organization (Table 4). System-level administrators and building principals appear to control the decision-making process for determining grade organization in Georgia's school systems. Interestingly, teachers and Georgia's Department of Education played a role in deciding grade organization in slightly less than half of the schools in the study.

TABLE 4

Persons Deciding Grade Organization*

PERSONS DECIDING*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
TOTAL	77	45	122	18	40	8	23	10

*1. Principal
*2. Teachers
*3. System Administrators
*4. Accrediting Bodies
*5. State Department of Education
*6. Survey by Outside Agencies
*7. Parents
*8. Other: Local Board of Education (7), students (2), task force (1)

* multiple responses

Staff Development

An important component of any middle grades program is the quality and commitment of the professional staff. Staff development prior to opening any middle school is one indicator of a commitment to the middle school concept and concomitant enhancement of early adolescent education.

In the schools reporting, visitation of schools with similar plans in operation by professional staff and in-service meetings of prospective faculty with consultants on middle level school development were primary methods of staff development (Table 5). A year or more of full-time faculty study and planning, summer faculty workshops prior to opening of the school year, and occasional planning sessions for prospective middle school faculty members were also reported to be an important part of staff development efforts.

A multitude of other staff development activities also were reported and are listed in Table 5. It is hoped that state-supported financial incentives for middle school education and improvement, coupled with increased numbers of undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs that specialize in middle grades education (4-8) will foster greater awareness of important staff development needs for teachers already functioning in middle grades schools throughout the state.

TABLE 5

Staff Development Prior to Opening*

ACTIVITIES*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
TOTAL	49	8	20	48	49	77	69	3

*1. A year or more of full-time faculty study and planning in your district.
*2. A year or more of full-time study by faculty representatives at a university in a program specifically to prepare middle level teachers.
*3. Funded planning project.
*4. Summer faculty workshop prior to opening of school year.
*5. Occasional planning sessions of prospective middle school faculty members.
*6. Visitation of schools with similar plans in operation by representatives of your school.
*7. Inservice meetings of prospective faculty members with consultant(s) on middle level school development.
*8. Other: Team leader training (1); principal's retreat (1); community orientation (1)

* multiple responses

Curriculum

Common Subjects

Every school reporting indicated that all students take a core of basic subjects including language arts, mathematics, physical education, science and social studies. Such is not the case either with required or elective exploratory course offerings or other curricular and extracurricular offerings.

Required and Elective Exploratory Programing

Table 6 reports the data regarding required and elective exploratory course offerings in the schools included in the study. Among required exploratory programing, foreign language, health, reading and sex education predominate. Among elective exploratory offerings, band, chorus, and home economics prevail. The data reported by grade level and amount of time are detailed in Table 6. Table 6A provides the extensive volume of data reported by respondents in the "Other" category for required and/or elective course offerings, and exploratories. There are nearly fifty such offerings provided in the various schools included in the study.

TABLE 6

Required/Elective Exploratory Programming+

GRADE	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*GRADE*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*
Agriculture	0/0	5/6	5/10	7/14	Home Economics	0/0	28/32	33/46	28/57
Art	5/2	43/48	40/61	32/65	Industrial Arts	1/0	27/25	29/38	30/51
Band	0/4	5/87	0/109	4/107	Journalism	0/0	1/6	1/8	2/11
Careers	1/0	11/19	15/24	20/27	Orchestra	0/0	1/19	1/21	1/22
Chorus	1/2	6/50	6/70	5/78	Reading	10/0	87/0	92/5	83/6
Computers	4/1	44/39	44/51	38/58	Sex Education	7/0	68/1	73/3	70/3
Creative Writing	3/0	23/4	23/9	20/8	Speech	0/0	0/2	1/5	1/2
Foreign Language	0/0	22/30	21/38	75/46	Typing	0/0	4/15	5/16	4/20
General Music	4/2	35/46	34/45	22/42	Others: See Table 6A				
Health	9/0	93/4	105/6	105/6	+Required /Elective (example 5/3)				

TABLE 6A

Other Required/Elective Exploratory Programing+

GRADE	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*GRADE*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*
Study Skills	0/0	3/3	0/3	0/2	Weight Training	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1
Science/Math	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	Personal Develop-ment	0/0	1/1	0/0	0/0
Introduction to Business	0/0	0/1	0/2	0/3	Communi-cation Arts	0/0	0/0	1/0	0/1
Graphic Arts	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	Juvenile Law	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1
Project Learning Tree	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	Develop-mental Guidance	0/0	1/0	1/0	1/0
Test Taking Skills	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	Planning for High School	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1
Home	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/0	Technology	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/1
Drama	0/0	1/2	1/2	1/3	Great Books	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/1
Library Skills	0/0	1/2	2/2	2/1	Geography	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/0
Personal Learning	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/1	Space	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1
Literature	0/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	Current Events	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1
Quest	0/0	0/2	1/1	1/1	Math Skills	0/0	0/0	1/0	1/0
Photography	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	+ Required/Elective (example 5/3)				

Other Curriculum Opportunities

Table 7 reports the other curriculum offerings in schools reporting, including elective activities, mini-courses and the like. These data, too, are reported by grade level.

By far, Student Council is the most prevalent elective activity among the schools reporting. Other activities reported in about half of the schools include social dancing, honor society, intramural sports for boys and girls, and interschool sports for both boys and girls as well.

In order to present data reported in the "Other" category, Table 7A is provided. In this table are listed the fifty additional curriculum opportunities provided by the various middle grades schools reporting.

TABLE 7

Other Elective Activities

GRADE	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*
Arts & Crafts	3	27	31	27
Honor Society	1	45	76	80
Intramural Sports (Male)	2	45	52	55
Intramural Sports (Female)	2	45	52	55
Interschool Sports (Male)	0	21	63	71
Interschool Sports (Female)	1	20	63	71
Photography	0	10	14	19
Publications	2	39	65	72
School Parties	2	50	56	54
Social Dancing	1	53	71	71
Student Council	6	80	96	91
Other: See Table 7A				

TABLE 7A

Other Elective Activities

Grade	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*Grade*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*
Y-Club	0	3	5	5	Drama Club	0	0	2	3
Arrive Alive	0	1	2	2	Teen Club (Girl's Service)	0	0	1	1
Science Club	0	5	7	7	Class Act (Manners)	0	0	1	1
FFA	0	0	1	1	Library Media	0	0	1	1
FHA	0	3	5	5	Basketball / Not Intramural	0	2	2	2
4-H 1	6	10	10		Juggling Club	0	1	1	1
Conservancy	0	0	1	1	Artist's Club	0	2	2	2
Academic Teams	0	2	8	10	Remote Control Model Airplane Club	0	1	1	1
Pride	0	1	1	1	Youth for Drug Education	0	1	1	1
YAC	0	0	1	1	Computers Club	0	1	1	1
Fellowship of Christian Athletes	0	1	1	1	Stock Market	0	1	1	1
Spirit Pep Club	0	2	3	3	Optimist Club	0	1	1	1
Math Club	0	2	5	5	Future Georgia Educators	0	1	1	1
Builder's Club	0	0	1	1	Vocational Club	0	1	1	1
Technology	0	1	1	1	S.A.D.D.	0	0	1	1
Football / Not Intramural	0	1	1	1	Study Club	0	1	1	1
Storytelling	0	1	1	1	Lion's Club Int. Advisement Program	0	1	1	1
Life Skills	0	1	1	1	Environmental Club	0	1	1	1
History Club	0	1	1	1	Industrial Arts Club	0	1	1	1
Cheerleaders	0	0	1	2	Youth to Youth	0	1	1	1
Yearbook	0	1	2	2	Anti-Drug Club	0	0	1	1
Problem Solving Club	0	2	2	2	Drill Team	0	0	1	1
Writer's Club	0	1	1	1	Jr. Beta Club	0	1	1	1

Instruction

Respondents provided data in several categories relating to instruction including instructional planning, criteria employed in assigning students to various types of classrooms (grouping for instruction), instructional schedules, independent study opportunities, and reporting pupil progress.

Instructional Organization

Middle grades schools in the study reported grade level and instructional plan(s) for the basic subjects (Table 8). Subjects included language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Instructional plans included interdisciplinary teams (two or more teachers working together with same students in two or more of the listed subjects), departmental (different class and teacher for each subject), and self-contained (one teacher for all the basic subjects).

The data present a complex and somewhat mixed picture of instructional plans employed by the schools included in the study. Generally, 5th grades tend to be self-contained, while grades 6-8 tend toward either the interdisciplinary or departmental plan or some combination thereof.

TABLE 8

Instructional Organization +

Instruction Plan:	Interdisciplinary Team	Departmental	Self-Contained Classroom
Language Arts	5th = 7 6th = 88 7th = 92 8th = 85	5th = 1 6th = 18 7th = 31 8th = 33	5th = 2 6th = 3 7th = 4 8th = 4
Math	5th = 6 6th = 86 7th = 93 8th = 84	5th = 2 6th = 17 7th = 31 8th = 34	5th = 1 6th = 3 7th = 4 8th = 4
Science	5th = 7 6th = 88 7th = 93 8th = 84	5th = 3 6th = 18 7th = 31 8th = 34	5th = 0 6th = 3 7th = 4 8th = 4
Social Studies	5th = 6 6th = 85 7th = 92 8th = 84	5th = 3 6th = 19 7th = 32 8th = 34	5th = 0 6th = 3 7th = 4 8th = 4

Other: Reading is common in interdisciplinary teams (19) or departmental settings (15) in grades 6,7, and 8; Special Education is common for self-contained settings (46) in grades 6, 7, and 8. Departmentalized teams, exploratory teams, and alternative education plans are common in grades 6, 7, and 8.

+multiple and complex responses

Numerous written comments and exceptions were offered by respondents. The tenor of these comments suggests that establishing interdisciplinary teams is not only difficult but that such an instructional plan creates scheduling nightmares. Further, the departmental plan of instruction is cleaner and easier to schedule. Data reported in Table 10 appear to substantiate this point, especially for grades 7 and 8.

Grouping for Instruction

The majority of respondents indicated that homogeneous grouping continues to predominate with efforts to provide heterogeneous grouping opportunities few in number. Data regarding the criteria for grouping, by grade level, and in three categories (home-base advisory, instructional groups in basic subjects, and instructional groups for electives), are reported in Table 9.

Grouping for home-base advisories is usually by random assignment. In the basic subjects, schools employ teacher recommendations, achievement tests and previous academic record as principal criteria in determining grouping for instruction. Finally, random assignment predominates as the criterion for assigning students for instruction in elective offerings.

TABLE 9

Grouping for Instruction*

Criteria	Home Base Advisory	Instruct. Groups Basic Subjects	Instruct. Groups Electives
GRADE	*5 6 7 8*	*5 6 7 8*	*5 6 7 8*
I.Q Test	1 5 8 7	3 10 15 13	0 1 3 3
Achieve. Test	5 20 23 18	7 60 76 73	1 8 10 11
Teacher Recom.	4 19 21 19	6 62 76 74	1 14 21 22
Age	2 10 8 8	3 28 29 27	1 5 6 5
Previous Acade. Record	4 13 14 13	6 60 70 65	1 10 13 15
Random Assign.	4 57 66 59	3 40 42 41	3 69 77 75
Other:	Stratified random assignment by achievement tests (59); counselor groupings and homeroom by last name (30).	Grouped for reading and math only (10); mixed by boy, girl, race (10).	Interest and talent (20).

* multiple responses

Instructional Schedule

Table 10 reports scheduling practices of the schools in the study. The majority of the schools rely on flexible scheduling within blocks for teams and daily periods uniform in length while a few use self-contained classrooms and daily periods of varying length. While these data seem to be consistent with those reported in Table 8, it appears that some schools strive to provide interdisciplinary team instruction within a schedule of daily periods of uniform length.

TABLE 10

Scheduling for Instruction +

GRADE	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*
TYPE OF SCHEDULE				
Self Contained Classsroom	3	14	17	15
Daily Periods Uniform in Length	4	47	64	58
Flexible Scheduling	6	85	85	80
Daily Periods of Varying lengths	3	17	16	15

+ combination responses

Independent Study

Respondents were asked to indicate by grade, any subject(s) in which opportunities are provided for some students to work independently of a class. Few schools provide opportunities for such independent study. These data are reported in Table 11.

TABLE 11

Independent Study

GRADE	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*
TYPE OF INDEPENDENT STUDY:				
Some students are released part or all of the time from the class(es) for independent study	4	18	19	21
One or more groups of students with similar interests work as a seminar	1	5	7	6
Some students have individually-planned programs with regularly scheduled time for independent study	3	9	11	12
Some students have time scheduled for work expereince with faculty supervision	0	8	10	10

Reporting Pupil Progress

The schools in the study reported a wide variety of systems for reporting pupil progress. Many combine a letter scale with informal written notes, percentage marks and regularly scheduled parent conference. The satisfactory-unsatisfactory scale is also employed in almost half of the schools in the study. The data regarding reporting pupil progress are found in Table 12.

TABLE 12

Reporting Pupil Progress

SYSTEM*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
TOTALS	63	17	17	51	85	84	4	60	7

*1. Letter Scale (A to E, etc.).
*2. Word Scale (Excellent, Good, etc.).
*3. Number Scale (1-5, etc.).
*4. Satisfactory-Unsatisfactory Scale (S, U, Pass-Fail, etc.).
*5. Informal Written Notes.
*6. Percentage Marks (95, 84, etc.).
*7. Dual System (progress compared with class and/or student's own potential.
*8. Regularly schjeduled parent conferences.
*9. Self-evaluation.
Other: Various forms of progress reports.

Counseling Students

One ingredient critical to middle level education is the firm commitment to support the affective needs of early adolescents. Such support begins with knowledgeable, competent, and caring teachers and administrators who are supported by strong counseling services and personnel.

Full-time counselors constitute the majority of personnel engaged in counseling students in the schools reporting. Individuals with home-base advisory responsibilities also play a major counseling role in the schools. Finally, in addition to other teachers, administrative personnel also play an important role in counseling students. These and related data are found in Table 13.

TABLE 13

Personnel Counseling Students+

Personnel*	1	2	3	4	5
TOTALS	77	42	14	114	39

*1. Home Base Teacher (advisor)
*2. Other Classroom Teachers
*3. Part-Time Counselors
*4. Full-Time Counsleors
*5. Other: Administrators; homeroom teachers; part-time counselor; social workers; school psychologist; learner-support strategist; school nurse; clerical aides; exploratory teachers; teacher volunteers; ISS teachers; Positive Direction teacher.

+ multiple responses

School Evaluation

An overwhelming majority of the respondents reported a "favorable" attitude about their schools by key groups including students, staff, parents and the public. However, a number of respondents reported their greatest frustration in seeking to promote a better middle grades education is the indifference of staff members. This is especially so with secondary-trained teachers. Table 14 reports these data.

TABLE 14

School Evaluation

	Estimate of Groups Attitude		
GROUP	Favorable	Indifferent	Opposed
Students	117	8	0
Staff	122	4	3
Parents	120	4	1
Public	109	14	0

Other Data

Data were reported by respondents in several other areas important to middle grades education. These areas include home-base or teacher advisory programs, percent of faculty who have specific college or university training for middle level teaching, plans for evaluating the school programs, major problems encountered in establishing the school and final comments, some of which are shared in the *Overview* section of this report.

Home-Base/Teacher Advisory

Fifty-three schools have a home-base or teacher advisory program. In most of these teachers serve as advisors. Other staff personnel also serve as advisors in these programs including administrators, counselors, guidance personnel and other staff members.

Thirty-three of the programs meet on a daily basis with sessions ranging in length from 10 to 60 minutes.

Faculty Preparation

Respondents were asked to indicate the approximate percent of faculty who have had specific university or college training preparation for middle grades teaching. Fifty-eight stated that 51 to 75% of their faculty had such training, while 41 reported a figure of 75 to 100% of the faculty had such training.

It is interesting to note the surprisingly large number of educators who appear to enjoy college or university training in middle grades education and the number of middle grades schools in the study that do not reflect important middle school characteristics.

Plans for Evaluation

Respondents indicated in the survey that SACS accreditation is the central process used to evaluate Georgia schools. In addition to SACS, schools in Georgia must meet the Georgia Department of Education

standards. With the Quality Basic Education Act, in order to qualify for middle school incentive funds, Georgia middle schools must also meet the guidelines outlined by the Georgia Department of Education.

Major Problems

A number of respondents offered feedback on the major problems they face in moving toward exemplary middle grades programs for their early adolescents. These are listed in Table 15.

TABLE 15

Problems Establishing Middle Grades Schools

Changing to a flexible bell schedule
Adjusting teaching and evaluation techniques to the middle school learner
Modification in the disciplinary procedures
Having to share staff with the high school
Need for more teachers in the schools in order to have common planning
Busing schedules limit instructional schedules
Need for more staff development in the transition from a junior high school to a middle school
Need for more certified middle school teachers
More understanding of middle schools at the central office level
Need for more variety in exploratory program
School is too small to implement all the middle school concepts
Scheduling in grades seven and eight
Marketing the idea to the public
Trying to meet the middle school philosophy with fifth grade in the building
Need for more funding
Problems with the facility
School growth prevented the full implementation of teaming schedules
Need for more time to observe model schools
Teachers who are not convinced that the middle school concept is valid
Lack of materials
Convincing parents that heterogeneous grouping is valid
Converting subject area teachers to middle school teachers
Providing for special education children in the flexible schedules
Lack of understanding by the teachers of team process
Finding time to schedule advisory
Scheduling band and chorus and the need for exploratory
Problems with using standardized testing to place students into groups
Cooperation between teachers and students
Large classes

SECTION TWO: OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

Conclusions And Recommendations

The major purpose of this study was to provide, through a detailed analysis of Georgia's middle level school programs, a data profile of middle grades education in the state. Such information provides not only a picture of middle level educational practices but may serve as a source of information for improving existing school practice at this level. The following conclusions reflect positive expectations for improving middle grades education for Georgia's early adolescents.

Middle Grades Education In Georgia

Conclusion 1

The majority of middle grades students in Georgia are housed in schools that contain either K-6, 7-12, or K-8.

***Recommendation* 1**

Students in grades five through eight ought to be placed in separate buildings for the purpose of providing early adolescents a specialized educational environment. In the absence of school housing independent of either the elementary or secondary grades, these students ought to be housed in a facility that provides some degree of separateness from K-4 and 9-12 students and programs. Early adolescents are developmentally unique and have educational needs somewhat different from elementary and secondary school students. These schools—regardless of name and location (separate building or "school-within-a-school")—should offer a unique educational program that provides a smooth transition from elementary to secondary school.

Conclusion 2

While most Georgia middle grades schools are not large by usual standards, a number of early adolescents are housed in schools with large numbers of students due to grade configurations that predominate at this level (K-6, 7-12, K-8, 9-12). Group size is critical to supporting the affective development of 10-14 year olds. They need to belong to smaller academic groups so they are not "lost in the shuffle."

Recommendation 2

Middle level schools with large enrollments should be reorganized utilizing the "school-within-a-school" concept to provide the type of personalized environment essential to sound early adolescent educational, personal, emotional, and social development. Such a reorganization will go far in assuring that schools will not become too impersonal or operate as mini-high schools.

Conclusion 3

A great variety of articulation strategies are used by middle grades schools to smooth the transition from elementary to middle and from middle to high school.

Recommendation 3

Middle grade schools in Georgia ought to continue to refine articulation procedures for the transition of students from elementary to high school. Continuing dialogue between respective faculties, administrators, parents, and students should make this critical transition experience a positive one.

Knowing "what's ahead" as students enter as well as exit the middle grades will cover a multitude of potential problems.

Conclusion 4

All the middle level schools in the study offer a core of basic subject matter including language arts, mathematics, physical education, science, and social studies.

Recommendation 4

Special emphasis should continue to be placed on the basic or common subjects with careful attention to the nature of the instructional processes used in the classroom. Action-oriented instructional techniques, including interdisciplinary teaching/learning, small group interaction, independent study and research, emphasis on skill development and opportunities for guided interaction with the world beyond the classroom should form the foundation of instruction at the middle level.

Conclusion 5

Staff development for teachers in preparation for teaching in the middle grades is limited to occasional planning sessions, school visitation, and in-service meetings with middle school consultants.

Recommendation 5

A more systematic approach to staff development for middle grades teachers ought to be implemented. Simply observing other school programs, attending occasional planning sessions, or engaging in unconnected in-service with consultants is insufficient preparation for teaching early adolescents.

An essential characteristic of sound middle level schooling is educators knowledgeable about and committed to early adolescents. Staff development that fails to address what we know about this age group in a systematic manner is a waste of time and money—two valuable resources in critically short supply!

Conclusion 6

The schools in the study offer a variety of exploratory programming on both a required and elective basis. While foreign language, health, reading and sex education abound, few schools offer exploratory opportunities in career education, computers, creative writing, foreign language (below the 8th grade), journalism, orchestra and speech.

Recommendation 6

Exploratory course offerings on both a required and elective basis ought to be increased and made more available to lower-grade students (5-6). Such offerings need to be carefully planned and based on the interests and needs of students. High school type experiences are inappropriate to this age level. For all middle grades students a greater variety of exploratory options ought to be provided.

Conclusion 7

Student council, social dancing, honor society, publications, intramural and interschool sports for both male and female students exist in most middle level schools in Georgia. Various other extracurricular activities are also offered to lesser degrees.

Recommendation 7

A wider range of extracurricular opportunities ought to be provided for all middle grades youngsters. Activities that provide opportunities for active and wholesome interaction among early adolescents need to be promoted.

Interschool sports, where extant, must be carefully controlled and regulated. Middle level schools are not and should not be considered a training ground of "farm teams" for high school sports programs! A wealth of medical and psychological evidence points to the degree of physical and psychological damage that too often occurs in poorly regulated varsity-type sports programs at this level.

Physical education and intramural programs ought to be available for all middle grades students and take priority over interschool sports. Football should not be a part of any middle school sports program. The potential for life altering injuries by engaging in this particular contact sport is simply too great at this age.

Conclusion 8

Instructional plans for the basic subjects vary in the schools in the study. Most organize instruction along departmentalized lines within daily periods that are uniform in length. However, a number of schools are moving toward more interdisciplinary teaming.

Recommendation 8

Middle grades instruction ought to be organized on a more flexible basis. That is, a reasonable combination of interdisciplinary teaming, departmentalization and self-contained classroom experiences ought to guide the instructional plan for middle level students and teachers.

The schedule ought to allow for instructional plans that smooth the transition from a nurturing, self-contained elementary experience to the more formal departmentalized schedules of secondary schools. Flexibility in scheduling will provide opportunities for both students and teachers to make instructional decisions that reflect the changing needs of this age group.

Conclusion 9

Many middle grades teachers in the schools reporting have formal training in middle grades education.

Recommendation 9

Currently, many colleges and universities in Georgia have developed State Department approved teacher education programs for training middle school teachers. Teacher educators throughout the state should continue to develop new programs and refine existing middle grades programs at both the undergraduate and graduate level that lead directly to middle grades certification.

In order to provide exemplary programs for middle school educators, colleges and universities must continue to conduct research and develop programs and field experiences that focus on effective middle level schools.

Conclusion 10

In spite of important advances among middle grades schools in Georgia, serious problems remain. With economic and demographic realities being what they are, we can expect the vast majority of early adolescents to continue being educated in educational environments that do not reflect the best possible education for the age group. Further, with few opportunities for specific staff development in middle grades education the need to get the word out remains critical. This situation demands a deeper awareness and understanding of this age group and their specific educational needs. It also demands better and more systematic staff development opportunities for middle grade teachers, administrators, and support staff.

Recommendation 10

It is critically important to remain aware of the essential elements of sound middle level education (Appendix 1) when developing or revising middle grades programming.

We are reminded that effective middle grades schools, in whatever housing arrangement, work hard to reduce the size of the group to which students belong, are more like elementary schools in climate and tone, than they are like high schools, and, make it possible for students and teachers to spend time together in non-instructional ways (Doda, George, and McEwin, 1987).

FINAL THOUGHTS

In the final analysis, schools that serve the ten to fourteen year old must reflect the best possible educational environment and experience available. In spite of the growing interest in middle school education, apathy is always lurking in the background. Simply because a school contains some combination of grades 5-8, a student body of 10-14 year olds and an appropriate name does not guarantee that its educational program is appropriate for early adolescents.

We have all seen and experienced the educational cycle where a new idea is embraced only to be dropped for another in a surprisingly short time. And before we know it the idea comes around again, usually in a fifteen to twenty year cycle. The middle school concept as we understand it today enjoys a rather brief history. Unless those committed to providing the conditions important to sound middle grades education continue to promote the whole middle school concept it may become history by falling victim to this educational cycle.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, Michael G. (1981). Vermont-New Hampshire Middle Grades Survey. ED 198 089.

Allen, Michael and C. Kenneth McEwin (1985). "Middle Level Teacher Certification: A National Assessment." Middle School Journal.

Allen, Michael G. and C. Kenneth McEwin (1985). Middle Level Teacher Certification: A National Assessment. ED 263 061.

Alexander, William and C. Kenneth McEwin (1989). Earmarks of Schools in the Middle: A Research Report. Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C.

Alexander, William & C. Kenneth McEwin (1988). Preparing to Teach at the Middle School Level. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Alexander, William and C. Kenneth McEwin (1987). Middle Level School Survey Instrument. Used by permission of the authors.

Alexander, William and C. Kenneth McEwin (1989). Schools in the Middle: Status and Progress. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Doda, Nancy, Paul George, and C. Kenneth McEwin. (1987). "Ten Current Truths About Effective Schools." Middle School Journal. 19, 3-5.

George, Paul & Lynn L. Oldaker (1985). Evidence for the Middle School. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Johnston, J. Howard & Glenn C. Markle (1986). What Research Says to the Middle Level Practitioner. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Lipsitz, Joan (1984). Successful Schools for Young Adolescents. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

Merenbloom, Elliot (1986). The Team Process in the Middle School: A Handbook for Teachers. (2nd edition). Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Perspectives: Middle School Education 1964-1984. (1984). John Lounsbury (ed). Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

This We Believe. (1982). Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

APPENDIX A

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A "TRUE" MIDDLE SCHOOL

1. Educators knowledge about and committed to early adolescents.
2. A balanced curriculum based on early adolescent needs.
3. A range of organizational arrangements.
4. Varied instructional strategies.
5. A full exploratory program.
6. Comprehensive advising and counseling.
7. Continuous progress for students.
8. Evaluation procedures compatible with early adolescent needs.
9. Cooperative planning.
10. Positive school climate.

Adapted from This We Believe (1982). Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association. 1982.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Michael G. Allen has been actively involved in middle level education for twenty-six years. A native Vermonter, he earned degrees in the field of education including the B.S. in Education (Castleton State College), M.A.T. in history (St. Michael's College), and Ed.D. in social studies education (University of Maine at Orono).

Mike taught middle grades social studies in Vermont and California, and in several teacher education programs in Vermont, Maine and North Carolina. Before returning to higher education in 1990, he served as Director of Curriculum for a large school district in Vermont. He has published articles, reviews and monographs in the fields of middle school education, social studies and special education.

Currently, Mike serves as an Associate Professor of Middle Grades and Secondary Education at Georgia Southern University. He also serves as the Director of Publications for the New England League of Middle Schools.

Ronnie L. Sheppard has been involved in middle grades teacher education in Georgia for the past fifteen years. Prior to coming to Georgia, he taught middle grades language arts in Texas. He earned his B.S. in English Education from Baylor University and his M.Ed. and Ed.D. in Elementary Education from North Texas State University.

Ronnie has served on the Publications Committee of the National Middle School Association and has published articles, reviews and monographs in middle level education, reading, and language arts.

Ronnie is currently serving as a professor and Head of the Department of Middle Grades and Secondary Education at Georgia Southern University. He also serves as Editor of *Becoming*, the official state journal of the Georgia Middle School Association and Georgia Association of Middle School Principals.